



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

August 9, 2022

The Honorable Board of Supervisor
County Administration Building
1221 Oakland Street
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear Board Members:

Subject: ADOPTION OF AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 5.08 OF THE
ALAMEDA COUNTY ORDINANCE CODE TO PROHIBIT SPECIFIED DEVICES
AND WILD COW MILKNG

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt the ordinance amendment related to prohibited activities and devices at rodeo events in unincorporated Alameda County; approve adoption of ordinance chapter 5.08 prohibiting wild cow milking and the usage of specified devices at rodeo events.

BACKGROUND:

On November 5, 2019 at the Board of Supervisors regular meeting, your board adopted an ordinance amendment adding section 5.08.175 to the county ordinance code to prohibit sheep riding/mutton busting upon receiving an informational report reviewing Animal Control regulations pertaining to rodeo activities at the Board Planning Meeting on January 15, 2019. Issues pertaining to wild cow milking and other practices were also presented, however, only sheep riding/mutton busting was addressed in the adoption of the ordinance amendment. Scrutiny continues to exist due to the potential harm to rodeo participants and animals specifically relating to the event of wild cow milking and the usage of specified devices such as bucking straps, spurs, and non-release ropes.

DISCUSSION/SUMMARY:

Rodeo activities are regulated under Chapter 5 of the Ordinance Code and certain activities are prohibited in Article II of the Ordinance. Adopted in 1993, language specific to rodeos was presented to the Board of Supervisors for adoption, as concerns were raised related to the treatment of animals. The existing ordinance currently prohibits intentionally tripping or felling equine or bovine animals and climbing on and attempting to ride ovine animals. The ordinance was last changed on November 5, 2019 with the adoption of an ordinance prohibiting sheep riding/mutton busting.

The attached ordinance reflects and addresses public concerns around wild cow milking and the usage of specified devices such as bucking straps, spurs, and non-release ropes.

Alameda County has a long history of agriculture and rodeo activities. However, concerns have been raised over the years that the current regulations are not adequate to address on-going rodeo activities that are considered unsafe for participants and unnecessarily cruel and/or inhumane to the animals involved. Devices such as spurs cause blunt trauma to animals' shoulders, and bucking straps cause painful irritation to their abdomens, including open wounds and burns. In addition, animals used in roping practice and events have suffered torn ligaments, broken ribs, punctured lungs, severed spinal cords and tracheas, and internal hemorrhaging. Breakaway ropes allow the animals to be released immediately without a sudden stop or fall. Furthermore, the wild cow milking competition, where lactating beef cattle that are not used to human handling are released, caught, and milked for sport, is not a sanctioned event by the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA).

This ordinance amendment expands upon existing code to promote public health, safety, and welfare through the regulation and control of people's use and keeping of animals.

Active rodeos in the County are mostly found at the Alameda County Fairgrounds, in the City of Livermore, and at the Rowell Ranch Rodeo Park located near the City of Dublin. Rowell Ranch Rodeo, owned and operated through the Hayward Area Recreational District is within the unincorporated area, and would be required to abide by any County ordinance.

Animal Control in the Alameda County Sheriff's Office is responsible for enforcing Chapter 5 of the Alameda County Ordinance Code.

FINANCING:

There is no increase in Net County Cost as a result of this action.

VISION 2026 GOAL:

The ordinance amendment supports our shared vision of **Safe and Livable Communities** by promoting public health, safety, and welfare as well as the humane care for animals.

Respectfully,



Richard Valle
Alameda County Supervisor, District 2



Dave Brown
Alameda County Supervisor, District 3

cc: Sheriff's Office
County Counsel

ORDINANCE NO. _____

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 5.08 OF THE ALAMEDA COUNTY ORDINANCE CODE
TO PROHIBIT SPECIFIED DEVICES AND WILD COW MILKING

SECTION I

In enacting this ordinance, the Board of Supervisors of the County of Alameda makes the following findings:

- a. The County of Alameda ("County") intends to promote public health, safety and welfare through the regulation and control of people's use and keeping of animals, including at certain rodeo events;
- b. Existing County Ordinance Code provisions regarding rodeos prohibit intentionally tripping or felling equine or bovine animals;
- c. Existing County Ordinance Code provisions regarding rodeos prohibit climbing on top of, riding, or attempting to ride any ovine animal (sheep), or to cause any other person to do so;
- d. The Board recognizes that the Wild Cow Milking event is not a sanctioned event by the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA);
- e. The Board finds that this ordinance is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to the common-sense exemption, because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity subject to this ordinance may have a significant effect on the environment. CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3);
- f. Spurs cause blunt trauma to animals' shoulders, and bucking straps cause painful irritation to their abdomens, including open wounds and burns;
- g. Animals buck violently in an attempt to escape the combined torment of the spurs and bucking straps, and may suffer severe back and leg injuries from the repeated, unnatural movement;
- h. Animals used in roping practice and events have suffered torn ligaments, broken ribs, punctured lungs, severed spinal cords and tracheas, and internal hemorrhaging.

NOW, THEREFORE, the Board of Supervisors of the County of Alameda ordains as follows:

SECTION II

The Alameda County Ordinance Code is hereby amended as follows:

Section 5.08.170 is amended to read as follows:

5.08.170 - Bovine animals.

- A. No person shall intentionally trip, drag or fell any bovine animal (including but not limited to, any steer, calf, bull, ox, heifer or cow) by the tail by any means whatsoever for the purpose of entertainment or sport, including during a rodeo or practice for a rodeo.
- B. No person shall intentionally milk or attempt to milk a lactating bovine animal (including but not limited to, any calf, ox, heifer or cow) by any means whatsoever for the purpose of entertainment or sport, including during a rodeo or practice for a rodeo.

Section 5.08.177 is added to Chapter 5.08 and reads as follows:

5.08.177 Prohibition of specified devices for equine, bovine, and ovine animals.

- A. No person shall conduct roping of any equine (including but not limited to, any horse, mare, pony, ass, donkey, burro, mule, or hinny), bovine (including but not limited to, any steer, calf, bull, ox, heifer or cow), or ovine (sheep) animal in any entertainment or sporting event, including a rodeo or practice for a rodeo, with the exception of breakaway roping, where the animal is released immediately after it is roped without the animal being subjected to a sudden stop or fall.
- B. No person shall use spurs or bucking straps upon any animal during any entertainment or sporting event, including during a rodeo or practice for a rodeo.

SECTION III

This ordinance shall take effect and be in force thirty (30) days from and after the date of passage and before the expiration of fifteen (15) days after its passage it shall be published once with the names of the members voting for and against the same in the Inter-City Express, a newspaper published in the County of Alameda.

Adopted by the Board of Supervisors of the County of Alameda, State of California, on the ____ day of September, 2022, by the following called vote:

AYES:

NOES:

EXCUSED:

ABSTAINED:

Keith Carson
President of the Board

ATTEST:

Anika Campbell-Belton
Clerk of the Board

By: _____
Deputy

Approved as to Form:

Donna R. Ziegler, County Counsel

DocuSigned by:
By: Heather Littlejohn 7/29/2022
Heather Littlejohn Goodman
Deputy County Counsel

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Ban on wild cow milking - plus spurs and bucking straps - could threaten Alameda County's rodeos

Proposal before the Alameda County board of supervisors would prohibit the popular cow milking stunt

San Jose Mercury News

August 14, 2022



Vic Rivers, of Livermore, holds onto a milk cow during the wild cow milking contest held at the “Family Night” event at Robertson Park Stadium in Livermore, Calif., on Thursday, June 9, 2011. (Doug Duran/Staff)

By [Shomik Mukherjee](#) | smukherjee@bayareanewsgroup.com |

PUBLISHED: August 14, 2022 at 6:30 a.m. | UPDATED: August 14, 2022 at 3:21 p.m.

CASTRO VALLEY — Separated from her offspring, a terrified mother cow darts into an arena chased by a rodeo cowboy on horseback — a pursuit that continues until the heifer is lassoed and a second cowboy tackles and slams the animal into the dirt.

As the crowd roars, the cowboy ties down the struggling cow with a rope and forcibly milks her into a bottle. That is what signals victory in wild-cow milking, a popular event at rodeos, which trace back through the history of the American West and the cattle industry that defined early settlements in California.

But that contest could end for good in Alameda County. Next month, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors will consider banning the act of tackling or milking bovine animals — such as steers, calves, bulls, oxen, heifers or cows — for entertainment or sport. The policy has been sought for years by animal-rights activists, who consider the stunt cruel and inhumane.

And the proposed ordinance doesn't stop at cow milking contests. It also seeks to ban the spurs and straps used by rodeo cowboys to provoke bulls or horses into bucking, along with the stiff ropes they use to yank cattle around or tie them down.

If approved, rodeo enthusiasts say, the far-reaching prohibition could threaten the future of rodeos at the Alameda County fairgrounds, as well as the Rowell Ranch Rodeo in Castro Valley that just celebrated its 100th annual event in May.

“Our lifestyles are important, cultures are important,” said longtime Alameda County rancher Brian Morrison at the supervisors’ meeting Tuesday. “For this ordinance to try to be piggybacked on to hurt a particular culture and institution like the Rowell Ranch Rodeo is shameful.”

It would be rare for a California jurisdiction to impose such a restrictive ban, and even local animal-rights activists are surprised the ordinance extends to devices that are central to rodeos themselves, and not just wild-cow milking. Earlier this year, the Los Angeles City Council supported the idea of rodeo rules similar to the ones being considered in Alameda County, though that proposed policy still awaits the council’s final approval.

Alameda County has already imposed some restrictions on rodeos. In 2019, the county supervisors [banned mutton-busting events](#), where children throw themselves onto the backs of sheep and ride them, often leaving the small animals with injuries.

Rodeo critics say many other rodeo sports, especially wild-cow milking, amount to the humiliation, abuse and torture of livestock.

“Rodeos have had their brutal day, and now, like those Confederate statues, belong in the dustbins of history,” said Eric Mills, who has organized against rodeos for decades.



Jack James Fagundes, 5, of Livermore, holds onto a sheep during the mutton busting held at the “Family Night” event at Robertson Park Stadium in Livermore, Calif., on Thursday, June 9, 2011. Alameda County supervisors banned “mutton busting” in 2019 after supporters of the ban argued it will prevent animal cruelty. (Doug Duran/Bay Area News Group Archives)

Dr. Rene Gandolfi, a local veterinarian who advocated for the mutton-busting ban, said the mental trauma suffered by animals during rodeos is just as acute as the physical stress.

“Animals experience stress, and the type of stress they experience is adverse stress, just like it is for people,” Gandolfi said. “If we simply say that the only injury to an animal is (one) that we can document with an X-ray, then we’re going to miss a lot of injuries — stress and fear, by themselves, are injuries.”

The new ordinance, introduced Tuesday by Supervisors Dave Brown and Richard Valle, will be considered by the board Sept. 20. Supervisor Nate Miley said the issue was postponed after others on the board pointed out that the county’s agriculture department had not been given an opportunity to review the language.

Like the mutton-busting debate in 2019, next month's board hearing will pit animal-rights groups against lifelong Alameda County ranchers who feel their way of life has been deeply misunderstood by the outside world.

"We don't get into this business because there's a lot of money in it, and we damn sure don't get into this business to hurt animals," Livermore rancher John Bettencourt said at the meeting, having just witnessed the birth of a new calf that morning at the ranch he owns.

"To look over and see that calf and think that we would use equipment to hurt, damage or injure animals, is frankly as big a misunderstanding of our lifestyles as some of the other people have (experienced) in their many diverse lifestyles here in California," he said.